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CHANGES
IN THE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE
A. D. 1400 - A. D. 1600

WOOD

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE,

FROM A.D. 1400 TO A.D. 1600.

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CHANGES

IN THE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE,

BETWEEN THE PUBLICATION OF WICLIF'S BIBLE

AND THAT OF THE AUTHORISED VERSION.

A.D. 1400 TO A.D. 1600.

BY

H. T. W. WOOD, B.A.

CLARE COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

Quove modo genus humanum variante loquellâ
Cœperit inter se vesci per nomina rerum,
Persequor ac doceo dictis.

LUCRETIUS, *de Rer : Nat :* v. 72.

London:
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1870.

302. f. 21.

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CONTENTS.

SECTION I.

PAGE

INTRODUCTION. 1

SECTION II.

ENGLISH BEFORE CHAUCER 4

SECTION III.

CHAUCER TO CAXTON 18

SECTION IV.

FROM CAXTON TO THE AUTHORISED VERSION. . 40

APPENDIX I.

TABLE OF ENGLISH LITERATURE. A.D. 1300—A.D. 1611. 65

APPENDIX II.

EARLY ENGLISH BIBLES. 67

APPENDIX III.

INFLECTIONAL CHANGES IN THE VERB . . . 70

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE,

FROM A.D. 1400 TO A.D. 1600.

SECTION II.

ENGLISH BEFORE CHAUCER.

As the chief intention of this essay will be to examine the manner in which the two main elements of our language, Saxon and Norman, were gradually fused together and amalgamated into one tongue, a process which, though for the most part accomplished before the time at which our subject opens, is yet the principal of the various changes undergone by our language during this period, it will, perhaps, be advantageous to go back to the first origin of English, and sketch, as briefly as may be, the course which the changes in the language followed prior to the time of Chaucer and Wiclif.

Before their age the two streams had already become one. Still, they were not as yet thoroughly intermingled, but were flowing, as it were, side by side, partly, not wholly united. The accomplishment of this perfect union, which was effected in that age to which our attention is now directed, it will be the object of this essay to note and to comment upon, since, as soon as it was really brought to pass, the formation of our language was entirely finished, and it was left almost in the same state as that in which we now possess it.

We may pass over with slight notice the Celtic element in English, merely remarking that it is larger than is generally supposed. There are often elements in a language whose origin it is not easy to trace, and English possesses many words whose roots are not to be found in any other of the Indo-European family. Probably very many of these are ancient British; but, besides such words, there are others, and a considerable number, whose pedigree we can trace back with certainty to the Celts, while not a few expressions now familiar and even colloquial are derived from the same source. Nevertheless the Celts were driven out too entirely from most parts of the country, for them to have left behind much of their language to mix with that of the invaders, and the language which the Saxons brought over with them into Britain during the fifth and sixth centuries became the mother-tongue of that which we are now using. Many writers go so far as to say that this language was really English, and that we do wrong in using the word Anglo-Saxon at all. Mr Freeman especially contends that the people were English, and that they called themselves and their language by that name[1]. Still, the language now spoken by us and that used by Alfred are sufficiently distinct to deserve two different names; and if we clearly understand that the people whom we call Anglo-Saxons have as good a right to the title of English as ourselves, and that it was from them that the island, before called Britain only, received its present name, we can hardly go very far astray in giving them the convenient and well-understood name by which they have been generally known. Anglo-Saxon, for such we will call it to prevent confusion, was a synthetic as opposed to an analytic language, and was almost entirely pure and homogeneous in its nature, having been

[1] *History of the Norman Conquest*, Vol. I. Appendix A. Also see an article in *Macmillan's Magazine* for March, 1870.

scarcely at all affected by contact with the speech of other nations before its arrival in Britain.

Of the earlier and pagan ages of Anglo-Saxon literature we have few examples, the epic poem of Beowulph being the chief. Such as they were, this and other similar poems were brought over with them by the Saxons; and it was not until the people had become Christians, that any writings were produced for which we can confidently claim an English origin. Cædmon was probably the earliest English poet of whom we possess any remains, and after him the language went on steadily progressing until the time of Alfred, affected somewhat by the Danish invasions, which introduced into it a Scandinavian element; somewhat by intercourse with the remaining Celts; and receiving a little, but very little, Latin from the priests. If we may judge from the greater number of Anglo-Saxon versions of the Bible which were made about this period, as compared with those that appeared in later times, the vernacular was then much more commonly used in Church services than afterwards. It was not until the influence of the priests became stronger, that they were able to force their own peculiar language upon the people, to the exclusion of the popular tongue.

Under Alfred seems to have passed the Augustan age of Anglo-Saxon, or at all events the best Anglo-Saxon writers lived before or during his time. After him the language steadily decayed and grew weaker until, as has been remarked, it stood in very great danger of lapsing into a sort of Dutch[1] stolidity in its character, when the Norman invasion quickened it again by the infusion of the fresh life and spirit of which it stood in need.

In treating of the effect of the Norman Conquest upon English, we must remember that the influence the newcomers exercised upon the language, though principally,

[1] Morley's *English Writers.*

was by no means wholly, a Romance influence. The ancestors of the Conqueror's followers were kinsmen of those Danes who had fought against Alfred, and had left traces of their presence in England behind them. One part of the nation settled on England, other parts on the various coasts of Europe; while the whole invading horde of Northmen which poured over North-Western Europe, formed part of that sea of human life which during the eighth and ninth centuries flowed in upon the old world. The ancient civilisation was effete and worn out, it had need of fresh blood, fresh life; and so from North and South and East the Barbarians poured in, to settle on, without destroying, the relics of the old world: to mingle with the sensuous beauties of the old classic life, the warlike grandeur of the North, the fresh and subtle knowledge of the South, and to be harmonised and subdued in their turn by the most potent civiliser the world has ever known, the power of Christianity.

Still, though they left behind some traces of the old stock, the two hundred years during which the descendants of Rollo remained in France were enough to change their tongue from that which the French had originally called "English" (Rollo's "Ne si by Gott," to Charles the Simple, sounds English enough) into the Norman French, which is the second main source of our language: French, that is, with enough of the Scandinavian element in it to enable it to assimilate itself the more readily to the Anglo-Saxon, itself a Teutonic language, though of a different family.

We speak of the influence of the Norman Conquest, but it must be admitted that the first introduction of French dates from the commencement of the reign of Edward the Confessor, who had many ties with the Conqueror's family. His mother was Emma, daughter of Richard, Duke of Normandy; and he was himself brought up at the Norman court. On his accession and during his reign, numerous

Norman ecclesiastics and Norman nobles found their way into England, and to some extent prepared the way for the great immigration which was to follow on his death, and, by the introduction of a large number of a French-speaking race, to effect the greatest change in our speech which it has ever endured; a change so great that it is at first difficult to see how it could have been brought to pass by the introduction into a whole nation of a body of men no larger than the Conqueror's army; so great that very many writers on the subject are disposed to attribute it to causes other than the more obvious and evident one, the influx of Normans. But if their number was small compared with the whole bulk of the nation, it is to be remembered that the Normans rapidly possessed themselves of the more important positions in the state, and made up, by their greater moral authority, for the fewness of their numbers.

In what manner, to what extent, may we suppose that this new influence made itself felt? In almost every case where one people has been conquered by another, the conquerors have adopted the language of the conquered. Where this has not been so, as with the Moors in Spain, or the Saxons in Britain, it is because the great number of the invaders has enabled them to preserve their own language. After the Norman Conquest the great bulk of the people still remained Saxon. The invading Normans were few in number, and really added but little to the nation except nobles and ecclesiastics, who formed, to a very considerable extent, a class by themselves, and whose language would therefore have the less effect upon that of the great mass of the populace. There was little or no desire on the part of the Conqueror and his followers to disturb existing institutions except in so far as was needful for their own safety, and everything goes to show that the French element was at first but slowly received; the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, for instance, continued for more

than fifty years after the Conquest. Gradually, under the combined influence of Norman-French and Monkish Latin, Anglo-Saxon began to lose its peculiar characteristics, and to receive into itself something of the nature of these languages. There was no learned class to keep it up and study it. It was no longer a literary language; and this very fact, that it was unwritten, helped very greatly to simplify it. During the first years after the Conquest, and even to some extent for a considerable period after it, the general speech of the people must have varied greatly in different parts of the country, according to the particular influence to which it was exposed. In large towns[1], where the Normans principally congregated, Norman was probably more spoken than anywhere else; consequently it was used in law courts, in parliamentary statutes, and for other state purposes. Hence from the intercourse of a body of Normans with the great mass of the Anglo-Saxon people, even here the more numerous, would arise a Saxon language with a considerable mixture of French. In the country, on the other hand, and in smaller towns, where there was perhaps a single Norman household surrounded by a peasantry almost entirely Saxon, the people would naturally and unconsciously oblige their lords to learn their Saxon, while at the same time they would adopt many French words, and more especially those words which were names of things before unknown, or even things principally used by the Normans. Too much stress has probably been laid by many writers—notably by Sir Walter Scott in *Ivanhoe*—on the general difference between Norman and Auglo-Saxon words, and the light which it throws upon the condition of the people: still some such difference certainly existed, and there are whole classes of words which are entirely taken from one only of the two languages.

[1] Morley's *English Writers.*

Such was, as far as we can judge, the immediate effect of the Conquest; but after the overthrow of the national civilisation, Saxon culture declined, while Norman culture advanced and took its place, or as perhaps it would be more correct to say, introduced itself into the old and failing body, and thereby preserved it from decay. The influence of the Normans was not destructive, it was life-giving; hence it has left as its result the only language which combines in itself the two great principles, Gothic or Modern, Classical or Ancient, of which one alone is present (to anything like an important extent) in any other modern language.

Not that it is to be supposed that English is a composite language, though that name has been incorrectly given to it. No such thing exists as a composite language[1], one, that is, formed in syntax, grammar and vocabulary in equal parts from various sources; while neither can there be a language which has not been affected by contact with others surrounding it, to a greater or less degree, according to the character of the people that uses it. There is not a civilised tongue, hardly a dialect of any sort, extensively spoken, which has not added something to Modern English. Such additions contribute largely to the power of the language, for continual use wears out whatever is weak or unworthy of preservation, and in the struggle for life only those words are kept which are strong and useful. English has received from external sources greater modifications than any other tongue, but it has no more right to be called composite on that account, than Latin has, because it was influenced by Greek, or Spanish, because it was affected by the speech of the Moors.

The French part (or Latin, for it is impossible to determine accurately to which source we owe many of the

[1] See Trench, *English Past and Present*, p. 29. Also Dr Guest and *Max Müller*.

words which have come, some direct from Latin, others through French) of our language was added to it; and English is, not the result of a fusion together of Norman and Saxon, but Saxon changed and improved by Norman or French additions. The grammar of our English at the present day is Saxon, wonderfully simplified, it is true, but still really the same. It is indeed quite remarkable to notice how few absolute changes have in this respect been made by French influence; to remark how French words brought into English, adopted directly the Saxon form and inflexion, whilst there is hardly a solitary instance of the opposite. The greatest effect was that many Saxon forms which were not suited to the new words gradually dropped away, while others which were similar to the French received an extension of use. Thus the *s* of the plural is only used with masculine nouns in Saxon, but from its use in French with nouns of all genders, the same form came to be adopted in English to the exclusion of the other Saxon plural endings.

Analyses of the comparative number of Saxon and other words in English have frequently been made. Archbishop Trench gives the following proportions:—Saxon 60, Latin 30, Greek 5, various 5, observing at the same time that these numbers only give the relative proportions of the words in the Dictionary, and afford no idea of the comparative amount of Latin and Saxon in our ordinary language. Perhaps the last two shares are rather large, but the division is certainly near enough to the truth to show how great is the preponderance of Saxon in modern English[1]. Still, numbers like these are naturally more or less deluding, and such calculations are more curious than useful, inasmuch as the spirit of a language is not to be weighed and measured out by numbers, or estimated by

[1] Max Müller gives 13,330 Saxon and 29,354 classical words, the language containing about 80,880 words in all (*Lectures*, 1st Series, p. 73).

counting words in a dictionary. To find how truly Saxon our present English is, we must go more deeply into the matter, and consider, not the number of words derived from each source, but their value and meaning. If we do this, we shall find that "nearly all the classes of words which it is the office of Grammar to investigate are Anglo-Saxon."[1] The articles and definitives, the irregular adjectives, the comparative words *more* and *most*, the pronouns, the irregular verbs, including the auxiliaries, nearly all the adverbs, prepositions and conjunctions, are derived from the same source. Besides these, the names of most familiar objects, of the natural divisions of time (except *autumn*, while *hour*, *minute*, *second* are all artificial, and all Latin), and other similar notions; specific and precise terms as opposed to general; words expressive of the common and ordinary feelings; all these and very many more have come straight down to us from our ancient mother tongue.

On the other hand, we owe to the Latin and French most of the words expressive of complex, general and abstract ideas; of minute and accurate distinction; the greater part of our theological, philosophical, and scientific nomenclature; many of our words relating to government and politics: all these are borrowed from classical sources, while of the same origin are a large proportion of the words chiefly used in poetry. If the words at the end of Chaucer's lines be considered, the words, that is, upon which the rhymes depend, it will be found that a much larger proportion of them are of classical derivation than of those in the body of his poetry. This is not to be wondered at, since the Romance languages, with their multiplicity of vowels, are much better adapted to rhyming verses than are those of the North.

Before the Conquest England had had few sympathies with the continent, but now she was joined to it, Nor-

[1] Spalding's *English Literature.*

mandy and England being under one sovereign, so that intercourse between her and neighbouring nations was encouraged. Hence she was brought into contact with that new Arabic learning which was then exerting a most powerful influence throughout Southern Europe, and of which she had before known nothing. This new learning, originally awakened by contact with Greece, was then returning tenfold to Europe what Europe had first lent to it, by giving fresh life and vigour to the torpid and dying civilisation of the older peoples. Hence too arose the chivalric influence which caused the chief literature of England for nearly three hundred years to consist almost entirely of translations from the French trouvères' poems[1].

Yet, great as was the influence of the Norman Conquest, it is easy to overrate it. There were numerous other, if less obvious, causes at work, and we are too apt to lose sight of them in considering that one which is most apparent and most important. Some writers, and those philologists of very considerable authority, such as Mr Price, the editor of Warton, and Dr Guest, the author of *English Rhythms*, have even gone so far as to say that the changes in our language which certainly had place about this time, were not the effect of the Norman Conquest at all, but would have happened in any event; urging that all the other low German languages have undergone the same or similar change as our own, consisting as that change for the most part does, in the general simplification of the grammar, the suppression of inflexion and gender, and hence of those complicated constructions which a synthetic tongue alone can make use of. But, besides this change common to other Teutonic languages, we have to account for a vast

[1] The publications of the "Early English Text Society" are nearly all translations. A sufficient proof of the poverty of our native talent between the Conquest and Chaucer.

number of Romance and Latin words which we alone possess, and which we can trace to no other origin. Dr Guest[1] would account for these by the influence of Latin, the language of the Church and of all learned men. Doubtless we owe much to this source, but why should we especially have gained more from it than the other Teutonic peoples? The increase of Latin learning was certainly now going on rapidly. The monks turned into Latin all the old legends and histories which they possessed; wrote in Latin, and consequently neglected the native English or Anglo-Saxon. Indeed the popular speech can hardly then have been in a fit state for use as a literary language, being in a state of change, and as yet entirely unsettled. Still, however much the use of Latin may have spread, such reasons as these seem hardly sufficient to account for so great an alteration as English underwent, and to allow that they do, seems to be merely running into the opposite extreme of error from those who look upon the Conquest as the sole cause of change. The truth appears to be that both these two influences had their own effect, but what proportion they bore to one another it would be impossible to say. At all events, to deny entirely the effect attributed to the Norman Conquest appears out of the question. Besides, most of the words of Latin stock have evidently come through the French; not direct from Latin, monkish or other. Certainly the monks used Latin in their intercourse with the learned, while in addressing themselves to the poor they used the dialects of the country. Thus for all literary purposes there was absolutely no national speech until the time of Chaucer, when the before discordant elements began to be blended together, and English became a real, a living tongue.

For some time after the incursion of the Normans there can be no doubt that there were—without reckon-

[1] *English Rhythms*, II. 105.

ing various dialects—two separate languages existing side by side in England, just as there are now in Belgium, Russia, and even nearer home, in Scotland, Wales, and Bretagne. Gradually, as time went on, these two naturally became more and more allied to each other, until they at last coalesced and made one. It would certainly seem as if the distinction in language continued, after the distinction in race had disappeared, for in the *Dialogue on the Exchequer* (ascribed to Gervasius Tilburensis, who died in 1198) we find the following passage:—

"Already by English and Norman cohabiting and taking wives from each other, the nations are so thoroughly mixed, that at this day it can hardly be discovered—I speak of the children—which is of English, which of Norman race; except only those ascribed to the soil, who are called villeins, to whom their lords do not give liberty to depart from their condition."

This shows how differences were dying out, though the lowest class still remained almost purely Saxon, and consequently preserved a dialect with much less Norman-French in it than their feudal superiors. Everything goes to show that there was, at this period, and for a considerable time afterwards, great diversity in the speech of the various ranks of society, as well as throughout the various parts of the kingdom. The upper ranks still clung to the French, the language of the court and of the law, until they were absolutely forced to give it up by the strong national spirit which was surging up from below; while Anglo-Saxon was left, for the time, solely to the more illiterate, and consequently the process of simplification and disintegration went on all the more rapidly. The less cultivated a nation is, the simpler and less regular is its language. It is from below, not from above, that our speech receives its greatest modifications; in the mouths of the uneducated class, who are ever apt to drop grammatical complexities, to confuse

number and gender, and to reduce the spoken language to as plain and easy a form as possible. When there is a literary, as well as a spoken tongue, a more stable standard is set up; and general culture and knowledge of the language prevents such changes, now regarded as solecisms, though they are precisely similar to those which effected the change in English from a synthetic to an analytic language.

In these early times it is not easy to trace distinctly the exact changes in English. The remains we have are not very many, and the varieties of dialect[1] make it often difficult to distinguish between the effects of time, and those of locality; to decide, that is to say, whether some peculiarity is caused by the locality to which the writer belonged, or the age in which he wrote.

For instance, Layamon, a parish priest of Worcester, and writing for his flock, employs a language very different from that of his contemporaries in London. He uses scarcely any French words, even though his *Brut* is a translation from French. Ormin too, who followed him, uses a very Saxon language, and both writers are quite intelligible after a very little practice in reading them. Ormin's peculiar device of spelling is rather an aid to the modern reader.

Sir Francis Palgrave strongly opposes the theory that French was generally used in England for the first two centuries or so after the Conquest, as the language of Law and Government. "Before the reign of Henry III.," he says, "we cannot discover a deed or law drawn up in French." English was used, according to Sir Francis,

[1] So great was the variety of dialect, that a writer of the fourteenth century states that there were spoken in England in his time three distinct dialects; Northern, Midland, and Southern. It was from the Midland, Western, and Southern dialects that, according to Sir F. Palgrave, Modern English was probably derived. The distinction seems to have been kept up until a late period of our history.

until the reign of Henry II., when it was superseded by Latin, the use of which continued up to 1297: from 1297 to 1487 French was employed, and after that date English. In 1392 English was recognised by special enactment. The usual opinion is based on a statement in the untrustworthy History of Ingulphus.

Still, there can be but little doubt that French was the language of the Court. A well-known story about Henry II., related by Ritsom, seems to show that he could not speak English, and it is most probable that few of the Plantagenet kings could. Richard I. appears to have been ignorant of the language. He was himself a *jongleur*, a true Provençal poet, and his influence very likely had not a little to do with the introduction of the Romance spirit which was now affecting English. Yet, in spite of this influence, the old Saxon was gradually enfolding into itself the younger Norman. All the favourite romances of the time were translated into English, bringing into the translations many new words, which were quickly absorbed and forced to fit themselves to Saxon shape.

And so the process went on, more rapidly as it gained further ground; the language ridding itself of all complexities of inflexion and the like; substituting for the immoveable suffixes, moveable prefixes; using weak preterites for strong, dropping the rules for the government of prepositions, reducing, in fact, a complex grammar to a simple one, until that stage in the history of our language was reached, which has been considered as marking the end of Early English, and the commencement of that Middle English in which Chaucer, Wiclif and their contemporaries wrote.

SECTION III.

CHAUCER TO CAXTON.

THE age which may be said to have commenced with Chaucer, is that to which the name of Middle English has been given. During it the processes which had been going on during the previous period were completed, and the final unison between the various component parts of the language obtained. When this period ended, it only remained for the language to receive the polish and finish which the work of great writers alone could give it, that it might be handed down to us in the form we now possess it. It was a time not marked by any great change, and the changes that did take place were introduced much more gradually than in the age before. The works of the great writers who lived at its commencement had the effect, as is always the case, of crystallising the language, and fixing it into a lasting shape. Had they been succeeded by a band of writers at all their equals in power, it is probable that a check would have been put upon all changes in our tongue, and that the language which we now speak would be very much more like that of the fourteenth century than it is. We now use the language of Shakspeare, or one closely

resembling it; but for the blank in our literary history between his age and that of Chaucer, we might now be using that of the elder poet. The years between Shakspeare and ourselves have brought less change than the shorter period effected which elapsed between Chaucer and Shakspeare. The same effect was produced on the French language by the writings of Corneille, Molière and Racine, since whom but little change in French has taken place.

Again, so gradual have the changes in English been, that it is by no means easy to take exact notice of them as they occur. It is not so difficult to compare together the works of authors who lived at the beginning and at the end of this period, to observe the differences between Chaucer and Spenser, and contrast the variations in the style and language of each poet; but to trace out distinctly the series of gradual changes, to see how the alteration was effected step by step, word by word,—how an inflexion here, an expression there, grew gradually less and less common, until at last it drops out of use altogether: this is by no means an easy task, and perhaps but a vague and imperfect outline is all that can be hoped for. We have here no strongly marked lines of difference, no sudden changes induced by external causes, as in the earlier ages of our literary history. It was a time of gradual and slow development, in which the seeds sown in preceding years were maturing and germinating, soon to produce their ripe harvest in that time which closes the period with which we are at present employed. Yet, if these changes were slow, they were none the less sure, and the development none the less certain because it had small assistance from without.

The introduction of French words was now proceeding from a fresh source; a source no longer internal, but external. It was caused, not by intercourse with a small

body of French settled in the kingdom, but by the larger intercourse between nation and nation, by communication from one literature to another. Thus a new character was given the additions which were now being made to English, since, besides the principle of natural selection which had been at work from the time of the Conquest, aiding the fusion of the somewhat discordant elements, a power of choice was wielded by those best able to exercise it, for most of the new words were the deliberate introduction of the wisest scholars and chief thinkers of the day.

It may be remarked that as much was added to the language, so also not a little was rejected and cast aside. Many words were, as it were, taken upon trial, found wanting, and consequently not permanently received into English; but a yet larger number of old Saxon words, before in common use, were now abandoned, some perhaps unhappily so, but most of them because Latin afforded more convenient expressions. A large class which have perished is formed by the Anglo-Saxon compounds, of which (like modern German) the language is so full. Such are the compounds of verbs and prepositions; as to *out-come*, to *out-go;* to *in-come*, to *in-go*. All these compounds have now dropped out of use, or are only employed in a figurative sense. The place they left vacant has been filled by Latin words; to *out-go* is now to *depart;* to *in-come*, to *enter;* to *before-come*, to *anticipate*, &c. Such also are compounds formed of two substantives, as *thunder-cloud*, *earth-quake*. Many similar words are now obsolete, especially a whole group formed with the Saxon *craft* (art). *Leech-craft* is now *medicine; book-craft, literature*, and so on. *Witch-craft* is almost the only remaining specimen. It can hardly be denied that here the language has sustained a sensible loss. As the knowledge of Latin increased, it was found that it afforded convenient equi-

valents for these combinations, and hence the practice of compounding fell into disuse.

It is not to be wondered at, if the first burst of national poetry be often contemporaneous with some peculiarly brilliant epoch in the nation's history. So it has been with other peoples, and so it was with us. The glories of Cressy and Agincourt had their counterpart in the literary glories of the age; and when the political power of England declined, so also did her literature. Between Chaucer and Caxton we have few writers worthy record. The disastrous wars of the Roses distracted men's minds from letters and study, nor was it until this dark time was over that literature again sprung up and flourished.

At the commencement of the period of Middle English, we have three principal writers, Chaucer, Wiclif, and Langlande, the author of *Piers Plowman:* to these three we may fairly add Gower, whose writings were not without considerable influence on the work of his successors. Each of the three first mentioned has a style very different to that of the two others. *Piers Plowman* was written for the people, and in their language. Even the character of existing MSS. proves this, roughly executed as they are, and without much ornament of initial letters and the like. Chaucer wrote for the cultivated class, and consequently used a dialect which had much more of the French element in it; a fact which is of itself sufficient to account for our being better able to understand him than his contemporary Langlande, since the French words he used, even if obsolete now in English, have their representatives in modern French or in Latin, whereas the obsolete Saxon words of Langlande have died entirely out of the language. Wiclif, again, differed from each of these two. He addressed neither the poor alone, nor the rich. His Bible was intended for all classes, and hence his style occupies in some respects a middle place between

the styles of the two others, though he displays a marked preference for Saxon words, and is entirely free from the Romance influence to which Chaucer owed so much. Perhaps we should not go far wrong if we conclude that Wiclif's translation offers us a fairer specimen of the common English speech, than do the works of any of his contemporaries; it was addressed not more to one class than another, and is probably therefore written in a language that the average of the community—not readers only, but all who heard it read—might understand and appreciate.

These three writers, then, are the men to whose writings most attention must be paid in considering the literature of their time. It is not altogether easy to say which of them exercised the greatest influence over their successors; the large circulation (for those days) which Wiclif's Bible met with, must have caused it to affect very deeply the entire language, at a time when books were so scarce, though it was more upon the uneducated, and less upon the student class, that his power was most likely exercised. Chaucer, on the other hand, was read only by the more educated, and consequently the effects of his writings are to be looked for in the literary, as distinct from the common language of the people. Thus we are able to perceive it more distinctly than that of his contemporary. Succeeding writers imitated Chaucer, but it seems by no means unlikely that more was done to elevate and improve English generally by Wiclif.

The language of Chaucer, though presenting considerably more difficulty to a modern reader than that of a couple of hundred years later, is still intelligible enough to us, while no very great amount of practice is required to enable us to understand *Piers Plowman*, though at first it is not very easy to read. Their language is really the same as our own, and we have now no longer

to deal with another tongue, which Anglo-Saxon in fact is, though we may call it, as the people themselves did, English, for it differs from our present language much as Romaic differs from Greek. The English language, in its new and modified form, was now once again the speech of the people. It had once more resumed its position as a literary language, and its capacity for such work was evidenced by the uses to which it was put. It became the vehicle of Chaucer's poetry—poetry which has rarely, if ever, been surpassed in our language. It was used in the translation of the Bible upon which all succeeding versions, down to our present one, were founded.

In construction Chaucer's language scarcely differs at all from Modern English, a few grammatical complexities, which had not yet been got rid of, forming the chief variations from the present style. The order of the words in each sentence, upon which nearly everything depends in an uninflected language, seems hardly yet settled, so that it almost appears as if the language felt a difficulty in progressing without its accustomed grammatical aids. In vocabulary English was still very incomplete, and it required many additions before its full perfection could be reached, its whole strength attained. These additions were chiefly made in the years between Chaucer and Shakspeare, in that period of which we are treating, so that the Formation of the Vocabulary is one of its principal characteristics. Since the time of the latter poet very few absolutely new words have been introduced into the general English language. We have made common, words rarely used before (the French influence during the eighteenth century had great effect in this); but, with the exception of scientific and technical terms and names for novelties introduced in modern times, we have added comparatively few fresh words. Of course the process of accretion has been going on, and still continues, but it is very slow at

present, whereas in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it was very rapid. "J'ai eu des idées nouvelles," says Montesquieu[1]; "il a bien fallu trouver des nouveaux mots, ou donner aux anciens de nouvelles acceptions." Civilisation was rapidly advancing, and caused a necessity for new words to express the new ideas which were crowding in upon men's minds.

Consequently about this time new words kept pouring in, chiefly, almost entirely, from Romance sources, to enrich our tongue, to supply the wants it had but lately become aware of, to enable it to give distinction to nicer shades of meaning and thought than it could before express; to adapt it, in fact, to all the requirements of a growing civilisation. Yet all this influx of new words had no power to alter the language itself; it was too strong for that: it forced the foreign arrivals to suit themselves to their new abode; it moulded them into its own shape, and compelled them to adopt the style of the old tongue, wearing them down and changing their shape until their foreign origin was barely perceptible, never allowing them to alter the ancient genius of our language. We may notice, in the writers of the time, these foreign words gradually assuming a new form, and changing from French into English in the pages of the writers of this time, just as we may do with words received into English from other languages in later times[2].

Many old grammatical forms of the Anglo-Saxon are still perceptible, though most of them have by this time lost their meaning, and were soon about to perish, since their real use no longer existed. Such are the vowel-endings of nouns, originally *a*, *e*, and *u*, which were all first merged in one common ending *e*, and ultimately altogether disappeared in most cases, though in some words

[1] *Esprit des Lois.* Introduction.

[2] For examples, see Trench, *English Past and Present*, p. 106.

the final *e* was retained long after its origin was forgotten, and its use had passed away. The infinitive ending in *en*, too, was still kept, though the *n* was soon omitted, and next the *e*, when the prefix *to* was added. This prefix was originally the sign of the Dative Infinitive, but when the inflexions were dropped, confusion between the cases arose, and *to* was supplied to the Nominative and Accusative cases also. Other similar instances of Saxon forms still remaining have been noticed in the writings of this age, but they were all now dying out.

We are too apt to accept Chaucer as an example of the style of his time. We forget that the greatest writers are naturally those who have the least in common with the peculiar spirit of their age, the most with that of after times. It is in the lesser writers that we can perceive most truly the real spirit of their time, the men who were guided by it, not those who directed it. Nevertheless it is not these writers who best repay our attention, or for whose sake we study the past literature of our country; they are but valuable in so far as they can throw light upon the writings of those men who have left behind them work that has really lasted, and the study of which will repay the toil spent in disinterring them from the crust of a dead, or almost dead language. The science of philology can be but subservient to the true history of letters. Her way lies, not in the pleasant paths of literature, but in its drier and duller regions. Her duty is to investigate the relics of past ages, to search out the characteristic, not the interesting, to collect dry facts which may assist towards a fuller knowledge of the nation's literature, the soul of that body for which language is but the skeleton. Nevertheless the facts so obtained may fitly be used in illustration, not of the lesser writers who supplied them, but of those greater ones upon whom such labour is not misspent.

Chaucer did in some respects what Homer did: he achieved great results with an imperfect instrument; and, like Homer, in the process he did a great deal towards perfecting his instrument. With him begins our true English literature. Faint foreshadowings before him there had been, Piers Plowman, even Layamon, but he is the first poet whose works have really lived, and are read even now; the true "Father of English song,"

> "The morning star of song, who made
> His music heard below."[1]

There is certainly this to be said, that if Chaucer had no models in his own country, he had plenty in Italy and the South of France, and of them he made abundant use. The traces of Italian influence are plainly perceptible at this time, and continue to manifest themselves more or less, though the influence was dormant during the period occupied by the wars of the Roses, until the reign of Henry VIII., when Italian writers were the acknowledged models and examples of English poets.

After the breaking up of the old civilisation, the earliest literature was Italian, or perhaps rather Spanish, since the poetry which arrived at its full development in Italy came originally from Spain, though it never attained its full perfection in its mother-country, where contact with the fresh Oriental mind had aroused a new spirit, a new tone of song. In the thirteenth century the Sicilian court under Frederic II. was the resort of poets, the home of poetry; and his marriage with Constance of Arragon, and the connection with Spain arising from it, naturally attracted Spanish bards to Sicily. The early Italian style is very similar to that of the Spanish singers, and it was in this that Dante's earliest poems (the *Vita Nuova* and *Consito*) were written, though he soon forsook

[1] *Dream of Fair Women.*

it for a manner better suited to his genius, and left it to less powerful hands. In it he has been surpassed by Petrarch, and in some sort by Boccaccio, writers belonging to the true Italian school, whose influence, first manifesting itself in Chaucer's writings, through him passed gradually into our literature, and at length showed its effects in the poems of Surrey and Wyatt, the "courtly makers"[1] of the reign of Henry the Eighth.

As is well known, Chaucer borrowed several of his plots from Italians. The *Clerk's Tale* is adapted from Petrarch,

> "Fraunceis Petrark the laureat poete
> Highte this clerk, whos rhetorike swete
> Enlumined all Itaille of poetrie,—"

while the *Knight's Tale* is from Boccaccio. Still the alterations effected by his thoroughly English mind are patent enough, alterations similar to those made by the writers of Queen Anne's time in the ideas and style they brought from France: the beauties both retained, but the weaknesses, the sentimentalities, both alike cut ruthlessly away. Borrowing, and even translating (in the *Roman de la Rose*) so much from Romance sources, it was inevitable that Chaucer's language should be deeply tinged with the Romance style, nor would it have been remarkable if this had been so, even to a greater extent than it actually is. His power over the language enabled him to unite together in his poetry the two different elements, as no one before him had done; and it perhaps was this faculty as much as any other, that caused the period in which he wrote to become a sort of landmark between the old and the newer English.

There have not been wanting some who have accused Chaucer of destroying the language by the crowd of

[1] *Maker* (like Greek ποιήτης), a poet.
"As I do when I *make*." PIERS PLOWMAN.

foreign words ("mottes Italianate" as one old writer calls them) he introduced, while others have tried to defend him by showing that the neologisms were not due to him. Whether or no the accusation be a true one, most of us will not be inclined to consider it a very heavy charge, or indeed look upon it as in any way a reproach, that our language should have been enriched by a number of new terms—terms which enabled it to express a whole multitude of thoughts to which it was before incapable of giving utterance. Very possibly some of the Romance words introduced by Chaucer had Saxon synonyms which were equally worthy of being preserved, but the good he did by develcping the poetic power of English, by increasing its flexibility and variety, is incalculably greater than any injury or loss which he inflicted on the language by overcrowding it with foreign words, even supposing that such injury was actually suffered. Verstegen says of Chaucer: "who writing his poems in English, is by some called the first illuminator of the language. Of their opinion I am not, though I reverence Chaucer as an excellent poet for his time. He was indeed a great mixer of English with French, unto which language he carried a great affection." Dryden also condemned him, as was perhaps not strange considering under what influence of French taste Dryden wrote; and Addison, though far more correct than Dryden in his estimate of our older poets, did the same: nor was it until our own age that he came to be reinstalled into his proper place amongst English writers. Keats seems to have been one of the first writers of our era who avowedly set Chaucer up as a model. In his *Endymion*, he thus addresses him,

> "But let a portion of ethereal dew
> Fall on my head, and presently unmew
> My soul, that I may dare, in wayfaring,
> To stammer, where old Chaucer used to sing"—

while a yet more ardent disciple of our first great English poet has arisen, within the last few years, in a writer who is hardly yet estimated at his real value, but whose sympathy with all that is best and truest in English song must needs, before long, assure to him a marked place among the writers of our time. Mr Morris has much in common with the elder poet just quoted, much, that is, which he also has learnt from Chaucer. Nor is he at all behindhand in confessing his obligations, as the following passage, from the *Life and Death of Jason*, may show :—

> "Would that I
> Had but some portion of the mastery
> That from the rose-hung lanes of woody Kent
> Through these six hundred years such songs have sent
> To us, who, meshed within this smoky net
> Of unrejoicing labour, love them yet.
> And Thou, O master!—Yea, my master still,
> Whatever feet have scaled Parnassus' hill,
> Since like thy measures, clear, and sweet, and strong,
> Thames' stream scarce fettered bore the bream along
> Unto the bastioned bridge, his only chain.—
> O master, pardon me, if yet in vain
> Thou art my master, and I fail to bring
> Before men's eyes the image of the thing
> My heart is filled with; thou whose dreamy eyes
> Beheld the flush to Cressid's cheeks arise,
> As Troilus rode up the praising street,
> As clearly as they saw thy townsmen meet
> Those who in vineyards of Poictou withstood
> The glittering horror of the steel-topped wood."

The quotation is rather a long one, but its beauty is excuse enough for its introduction, with the fact that it shows how one of our writers is now going back for models to the first and perhaps the greatest master of English poetry. To dwell long on the influence exerted by Chaucer's works on writers of the present day would hardly suit our subject; though, before entirely quitting it, allusion

may be made to the short poem by George Eliot, *Jubal*, as belonging, in some sort, to the school which holds Chaucer as master, rather than to that which has been among us since the early days of the century, the time of Wordsworth and his compeers.

In his *Essay on the Language and Versification of Chaucer*, Tyrwhitt has given us a tabular statement of the condition of the English language at the time when Chaucer commenced to write, and as it will serve to show very distinctly the principal differences which have arisen since that time, a good deal of what follows has been taken from it, though some slight additions have been made.

1. The prepositive Saxon article re, reo, þæt had been dropped, and *the* without gender substituted.

2. The declensions had been reduced from six to one. The cases had been dropped, and only the uniform genitive in *es* or *s* retained.

3. The adjective had lost all distinction of gender, case, or number.

4. The personal pronouns retained only one oblique case—at least so Tyrwhitt says, but *mine, thine, our*, &c., are true genitives. So, "maugre *thin*" (*Havelok the Dane*) "in spite of thee," and "some *ouren* went to the grave" (Wiclif).

The Interrogative and Relative *who* had now only a genitive *whos*, and an accusative *whom*, and no number.

The Demonstrative *this* and *that* had only the plurals *these* and *those*, and no case. Other pronominal words had become undeclined with very few exceptions.

5. The verbs were very nearly reduced to their present simple state, and had but four moods and two tenses, present and past. The future with *shall* was coming into use. It appears to have been first used by Layamon, but the original meaning of *shall* was still kept up by Chaucer, "For by the faithe I *schal* to God."

In the inflexions of the verb, the singular was as now, *I love; thou lovest; he loveth.* In the plural sometimes the Saxon form in *-eth* was used—*we, ye, they loveth.* Sometimes the form in *-en—we, ye, they loven.* This latter was universally used in the past tense—*we loveden,* &c. Of course this plural inflexion was dropped before the time of Shakspeare.

The Saxon termination of the infinitive was changed to *-en; to loven.* This *n* was beginning to be dropped, leaving *to love.* The Present Participle was generally terminated in *-ing,* but the old form in *-ende* or *-ande* was still in use—*lovende* and *lovande:*

"Giv-*and* and tak-*and* woundes wide."—BARBOUR.

(The changes were, *-end, -ind, -in, -ing.*) The Past Participle was formed in,—i. *-ed,* or contractions of *-ed,* such as *-e* final, as *caste, putte, hurte.* (This *e* was not long after dropped.) ii. *ed* transposed into *de.* Hence *redde, spredde, fedde,* whence, by dropping unnecessary letters, we get our modern forms; these, from being identical in sound with the present, have often got to be written in the same way. iii. *ed* contracted into *t; lette, mette.* iv. *ed* changed into *te; bente, bilte.* Hence, as before, the modern forms.

The Past Participle was also formed in *-en,* more especially in irregular verbs. Sometimes the *n* was lost; thus we find *take* for *taken.*

The auxiliaries were still inflected, though not for long after Chaucer—*we shallen loven.*

To haven and *to ben* were complete verbs.

6. The indeclinable parts of speech (all Saxon) were gradually being abbreviated.

Such are some of the most characteristic points in the language of Chaucer. To notice all the differences between his English and that of his successors, would be a task of considerable difficulty and of very great length. It

would be impossible to note the exact time of most of the changes in our tongue: all we can hope for is a general sketch which may to some extent indicate the direction in which these changes lay.

The language of Gower does not differ very materially from that of his greater contemporary. It contains a slightly larger proportion of French words, and is a little less English in style. He first wrote in French, after the manner of his time; and he does not seem to have made use of English at all until encouraged by Chaucer's example.

To turn to another of the chief writers of this epoch. Piers Plowman is in style and syntax very much more Saxon than Chaucer—as any can see at once by the most careless glance at the two poets. Yet it is remarkable that the actual proportionate number of Romance words employed by him is not much greater than that used by the latter. The great difference is that Langlande introduces a much larger number of Anglo-Saxon words which have since become obsolete, and it is this that renders his writings so much more difficult of comprehension by us, than are those of his courtly rival. Like Layamon, Langlande was a native of the Welsh borders; and very probably his language derived a good deal from the dialect of his country. Whether this use of a more Saxon or old-fashioned idiom was purposely, or only unconsciously adopted, it is of course quite impossible to say. All that is certain is that his book was written for the poorer sort. It is worth noting, in passing, that this period was one of great disturbance amongst the peasantry. The Jacquerie in France, and the rebellions of Wat Tyler and Jack Straw, show this.

In very many respects Langlande is more nearly allied to the writers who preceded than to those who followed him. In his rhythm he adopted the later Anglo-Saxon

style, and has consequently absolutely nothing in common with the new style of Chaucer, which had been born in Italy. To so great a degree is this true, that he is scarcely more modern in style than the *Ormulum*, which was written more than a hundred and fifty years before, though of course his vocabulary is of a very different type. One noticeable point about it is that of the French words used by him a very large proportion scarcely took any root in the language at all. Such are "*brocage*," "*creaunt*," "*fenestres*";[1] while on the contrary only about a hundred of Chaucer's French words are now obsolete. Also nearly all Piers Plowman's foreign words were already existing and in use in English, whereas Chaucer brought in a great many new ones, the necessity for rhyming words not being felt by the former.

Before turning from the poetry of this age to its prose, a few remarks may be made on the pronunciation of English, so far as we can discover what it really was; since it is of course only from poetry that we can obtain any knowledge of it at all. Even the old alliterative Anglo-Saxon poems cannot give us much help, since we know nothing of their rhythm. Our only aid must be derived from the rhymed verse of Chaucer and his successors. Examining this we may notice many differences that have since vanished. The genitive case was then pronounced as a dissyllable, *e.g.*, *shourès*, *croppès*, *shirès*, &c., though even in those early times it was used as a monosyllable, a freedom which had obviously arisen from common usage in speaking. The final *-ed* of the past tense was also sounded, *endurèd*, *percèd*, *bathèd*; and this practice endured very much longer than the last. Indeed it cannot even now be said to be wholly extinct. Another important point was the pronunciation of the final *e* in many words (*e* feminine, Tyrwhitt calls it). A great deal

[1] Trench, *English Past and Present*, p. 86.

has been written about this *e* final, but there is no doubt that in Chaucer's time it was pronounced plainly enough. Not to speak of the numerous lines which will not scan unless this *e* is sounded, there are several instances in Chaucer and his contemporaries where it occurs at the end of a line, and is made to rhyme as a distinct syllable. Gower makes *Rome* rhyme with *unto me*, and *time* with *by me*. Occleve rhymes *hye me* with *tyme*, and *ny* (nigh) *me* with *pryme, tyme* and *cryme*[1]. In Lydgate the *e* final appears to be sometimes sounded, sometimes not.

The position of the accent is another thing which tells much of the history of a word. Chaucer accents such words as *licoùr, cordge, mariàge, vertùe, natùre,* on the last, thus showing that they had not been sufficiently long in England to have acquired the true English accentuation. Such variations as these are evident throughout our history. A word is brought into our language, first as an acknowledged foreigner, with the pronunciation of its own country. Gradually the word becomes more familiar, and losing its foreign dress, gets to be sounded in the same way as the other words in whose company it is used. So in Milton even we find *blasphémous, triúmphed, conflágrant, accéss, insúlt,* &c. As for the orthography of the language, no great attention need be paid to changes in it. For the most part they only took place when there was not much writing, though before the invention of printing orthography remained in a very unsettled state: at first it was of course chiefly phonetic.

We may now turn to Wiclif, the great prose writer of this time. In him is shown most strongly that Anti-Roman feeling—which at last culminated in the Reformation—that is visible in other forms in his two principal contemporaries. He is the Protestant reformer, the first of a long series, striving after what he holds to be religious

[1] Marsh, *Lectures on the English Language.*

freedom and religious truth. Langlande declaims in the name of the people against the religious servitude to which they were subjected by the priests; Chaucer expresses the feeling prevalent in the more cultivated classes; dislike of, and contempt for, the priests and the foreign yoke of the Roman Church. In all three is manifested the strong spirit of religious independence at work in England. In Wiclif the influence of Continental learning is scarcely to be seen at all. Although as regards the mere number of foreign words he has almost as many as any of his contemporaries just mentioned, yet they are for the most part from a different source, the Latin Vulgate, and other Latin religious works. Hence the main difference between the English of Wiclif and that of Langlande is in grammar rather than in vocabulary. The partly local dialect in which *Piers Plowman* is written affords one reason for this, but the more important cause lies in the subjects with which Wiclif deals, and especially in the nature of his chief work. He was the first to make use of that style which was afterwards adopted as peculiarly the religious style, and used by most succeeding theological writers up to the time of Charles I.

Theology was now the chief study of learned men, and it was upon subjects connected with it that the best writers, the most learned scholars, were engaged. Hence the style employed in the discussion of such matters attained a higher level than that of the ordinary prose of the same time, though perhaps it scarcely equalled that of contemporary poetry. It was long before prose writing was esteemed in the same degree as poetry. One was considered as an art, the other as merely a useful accomplishment.

There is not much reason to suppose that Wiclif used any other than the common dialect of his time, in his translation of the Bible, except as regards those Latin

words which he adopted from his original. The glosses on some of his MSS. show that these, or many of them, were for some time not generally accepted into the language, since they were translated by annotations on the margin; for instance we find

Yvel fame, *or schendeschepe.*
Maales, *or men.*
Affection, *or love.*
Benignity, *or goodwill.*
Sacrilegie, *that is, Theft of holy things.*
A libel, *that is, a litel boke.*
Detractours, *or open bakbyters.*

In many of these cases the word explained is now much simpler than the explanation; in others we have still both words, the Saxon usually in a particular, the Latin in a general sense.

There are naturally many peculiarities in Wiclif's diction, such, for instance, as his uniform use of *shall* as an auxiliary, in which he differed from other writers of his time; but, with the variations above mentioned, his language seems to conform sufficiently closely to the scheme laid down for that of Chaucer. His grammar is much the same, but the greater number of obsolete Saxon words in his works render them rather less easy of comprehension at present than Chaucer's poems.

After these great writers we find very little worth record in our literature till after the invention of printing. The state of the country was sufficient to account for this: civil war left but little time for book-making. Hence we have small record of the changes which went on in English, changes that proceeded all the more rapidly as the language was spoken more than it was written. The rough usage of daily life wore down our tongue to smoothness and flexibility, more rapidly than any employment of it for literary purposes could possibly have done.

As poets during this period of comparative lethargy, we have Barbour, who was indeed contemporary with Chaucer, writing in the Northern dialect of English (the term *Scotch* was then equivalent to *Gaelic*). His dialect shows some difference from that of Chaucer, but Scotch and English seem then to have been even more nearly allied than they were in later times, after Scotland had had so much connection with France. Later on came Thomas Occleve, the first poet of the fifteenth century. His works are mainly translations. He omits the final *n* of the infinitive and third plural, which was seldom done in the age preceding. Contemporary with Occleve was James I. of Scotland, whose *King's Quhair* may be regarded as English, not Scotch, though it introduces some Scandinavian idioms, due to its author's place of birth. This poem shows a remarkable freedom from French idioms, while the proportion of Romance words is scarcely greater than in Chaucer, to whom King James acknowledges his debt, speaking of his

> "Maisters dear
> Gower and Chaucer, that on the steppes sate
> Of rhetorick while they were livand here,
> Superlative as poets laureate."

It does not seem at all improbable that the MS. (there is only one) of the *King's Quhair* has been altered by a Scotch copyist. If this is so, possibly many of its peculiarities might vanish.

After King James comes Lydgate, whose *Story of Thebes* is an imitation of Chaucer. His other works are much more modern. As before noted, the final *e* is not yet quite mute. The vocabulary is still increasing, but no very great changes in either syntax or inflexion are yet to be remarked. He carried on the vein of allegory which the *Romaunt of the Rose* introduced into England, and which, showing itself in the writings of Hawes, produced its last and greatest effort in the *Faerie Queene*.

Of prose writers there were very few; we have to wait for the development of English prose until the art of printing had made some progress. What writers there were, were mainly theological. Pecocke, whose *Repressor* appeared in 1440, was the chief of these. His grammar is much the same as that of Wiclif, with some considerable improvement in construction and expression, and a slight tendency to greater simplicity. He uses *hem* for them (our colloquial *'em, e.g.* "I saw 'em," is derived from this word), and also the plural in *-en:* "The branches grewen out of the boughs." The English of Pecocke is considerably easier to the modern eye than that of writers at the commencement of the era of Middle English, and this alone makes the change of style evident to us.

To the same period are to be referred the curious *Paston Letters,* which throw considerable light upon the private life of the time. Though written in a familiar style, they are not nearly so quaint as we might expect in their English.

Such were the chief writers who lived and worked before the invention of printing. It might perhaps be a more accurate classification if with them were joined a few of their immediate successors, who lived indeed while the printing-press was at work, but before its effects were widely felt. However, classification is but a lame and awkward affair at best. It may be convenient: it never can be accurate.

In these men we see the signs of change; whence the change came, it is hard to say. Doubtless the French wars were not without their effect on English. The returning soldiers must have brought back with them some stray waifs of French language, though perhaps not so very many. The extension of commerce, too, brought together people of various nations, and caused numerous

fresh terms to be adopted into English. New articles of merchandise brought with them their new names. Again, as the civil law took stronger root in England, and the science of jurisprudence began to be studied by Englishmen abroad, legal terms were added to the tongue. The sciences, too, all reached us through France. From these and other similar causes the growth of the vocabulary of English was very rapid; so rapid that it was noticed by writers of the age. Even at the time of Waller this increase was still proceeding; he speaks of "a daily changing tongue," though in his time the growth was about complete, and we have had no such changes as he anticipated to overwhelm and bury his verses.

The period of change did not extend long after the invention of printing. The increase of books consequent thereupon solidified and strengthened it, putting an end to that period of flux and reflux during which alone the language was capable of receiving important change.

SECTION IV.

FROM CAXTON TO THE AUTHORISED VERSION.

JUST before the invention of printing our literature was at a very low ebb indeed. "England," says Hallam[1], "under Edward IV., presents an appearance, in the annals of publication, about as barren as under Edward the Confessor." The stimulus lent by the invention of printing was indeed required, but it had the advantage of being applied to a mind that had been prepared for new exertions by its long repose, during which it had been gaining strength for the new efforts it was before long to make. The period of literary quiescence which intervened between the age of Chaucer and that which commenced in the latter part of Henry the Eighth's reign, was not without its advantages. In the continual ebb and flow of civilisation each onward stage of progress is preceded by a period of apparent inactivity, during which it seems as if the flood were gathering strength for the coming wave. The cycles alternate, rest and movement; it seems as if a period of sleep and torpor were as necessary to the collective as to the individual mind of man. At all events, so it has ever been. The age

[1] *Literary History.*

of Elizabeth was preceded by that of which we are speaking; the age of Anne by the time when England was under the unhappy Stuart rule; the age of Wordsworth by that time of intellectual barrenness which closed the eighteenth century; our own age we may hope will be the preparation time for some other glorious epoch in our history of letters.

In considering the influence exercised at the outset by the Art of Printing, it is as well to be on our guard against an over-estimate of its power. There is great tendency to think too much of the effect of mechanical inventions on humanity. In our own time the advances made by mechanics have been so wonderful, that we, living in a wholly mechanical age, are apt to do this, and to look upon them as agents in, rather than as natural consequences of, the development of the human mind. Man's mind is superior to mechanism, however subtle—to machinery, however marvellous; and its onward course may be assisted, even guided, by them as by other developments of human thought, but never arrested in its progress by them, or turned aside from the path it is predestined to pursue. Had Guttenberg never set up his press at Mentz, had Caxton never crossed over into England, we should still have had a Shakspeare and a Spenser, though they would have written under different conditions, and consequently in different styles.

Still, the influence of printing was great indeed, the greatest of any mechanical influence ever exerted upon the minds of men. Only it was so great that changes in which it had no real share have been laid to its account, changes which must have happened in any event. This is certainly not to be wondered at. The changes took place at the same time; and when one great disturbing influence has been at work, it is only natural that the effects of other and hidden causes should be set down as

caused by it. So it was in the case of printing. When the art was young—and it was very long before it attained anything like completeness—it in reality exerted but little influence.

Arrived, indeed, at its full perfection, it was a most potent instrument of change; but on its first introduction into England it produced comparatively small effect. At the present day our printed language entirely rules our spoken one; but at the time when Caxton lived the very opposite was the case. Indeed, perhaps it might be nearer the truth to say that there were then two languages, the written and the spoken, until printing, by extending knowledge, enabled the former to overpower the latter, and absorb it into itself. It is only of the written tongue that we can really obtain any true knowledge. Of English as it was spoken we can get but faint glimpses, guessing at it by inference from that more lasting form of the tongue which we still possess. On the whole, we may say that the great effect of printing was shown in its rendering the language uniform and fixed, and thereby causing any future change in it to be a matter of considerable difficulty.

With the ultimate effects of printing we have here nothing to do: they have perhaps not even yet reached their furthest point, and they certainly continued to increase and grow for a period long after that under discussion. Our business lies with the more immediate effects caused by the introduction of the art, and none other, though it is not always easy to distinguish them; for, seeing how wonderful are the changes which printing has produced, men find it difficult to conceive that these changes were very gradual in their introduction, and that it was not until some years after Caxton's press had been set up, that it began to spread its influence abroad.

The first effect consequent on the multiplication of books caused by the new art, was that the various dialects of English became for the most part merged into one, and that one the form in common use in the southern counties, and especially in London. An author was enabled to address a far larger public than before, and thus to extend his influence over a wider circle. Hence the dialect used by the cultivated class, in which books were written, began to be used more and more throughout the country, and differences of dialect to be shown only amongst the uneducated portion of the community which books were unable to reach.

Indirectly also, printing assisted many changes which it did not originate. The disuse of inflexion naturally caused a great alteration in construction. It became necessary to break up into short separate propositions, sentences which would otherwise have become involved and obscure, when all the cases had but one form, and when the various persons of the verb had become in nearly all cases indistinguishable from one another. No writer can construct without obscurity in English those long and complicated sentences which are plain enough in Greek and Latin. Principal and dependent sentences in English must of necessity have the same form; and so, in these and similar cases, it becomes needful to mark clearly out by such artificial and mechanical aids as *stops* and *breaks*, the distinctions in meaning which in a synthetic language are made sufficiently distinct by the aid of inflexion.

Now printing, being so much more easily and quickly read than manuscript, fostered still further this tendency. The clearest MS. necessitates some care and study in the reading before its meaning can be grasped. It does not, like a printed page, convey to the eye at the first glance all that it contains. Hence the trouble of making out the intention of an intricate sentence was really less

irksome when every word required, so to speak, to be *read* carefully. Consequently there grew up an inclination to write what would appeal at first sight to the mind, to write in fact so that the sentence became a whole, to be grasped by the mind at once, not an assemblage of various words, whose conjoint meaning required a certain amount of thought (however slight) before its intention was manifest. This tendency to brevity involved an increased use of marks to assist the eye and separate the language, and this multiplication of the signs of punctuation again reacted upon the language, and assisted yet further the simplification of the English grammar. Mr Marsh, in his *Lectures on the English Language*, has some remarks which illustrate yet further the meaning of what has just been said:—"The use of commas, semicolons and brackets, supplies the place of inflexions, and enables us to introduce, without danger of equivocation, qualifications, illustrations, and parenthetical limitations, which, with our English syntax, would render a long period almost unintelligible, unless its members were divided by marks of punctuation. Without this auxiliary, we should be obliged to make our written style much more disjointed than it now is, the sentences would be cut up into a multitude of distinct propositions, and the leading thought consequently often separated from its incidents and its adjuncts. The practice of thus framing our written style cannot but materially influence our use of language as a medium of unspoken thought, and, of course, our habits of intellectual conception and ratiocination. It is an advantage of no mean importance to be able to grasp in one grammatical expression a general truth, with the necessary limitations, qualifications and conditions, which its practical application requires, and the habitual omission of which characterizes a shallow thinker; and hence the involution and concentration of thought and style, which

punctuation facilitates, is valuable as an antidote to the many distracting influences of modern social life."[1]

Another way in which the influence of the printing-press was indirectly shown, was in the assistance it gave to the spread of classical learning. The revival of classical learning in Italy, under the rule of Lorenzo de Medici, seems to have arisen, apart from any stimulus exerted by the art of printing. Still the new art aided this, as it did every other advance in knowledge and civilization. For some time scholars (especially at Florence) had been at work correcting and revising classical MSS., but their labours were little known abroad until copies of their works could be multiplied more rapidly than by transcription. Something also like a *textus receptus* of each author was obtained, when an edition of him was printed, and this alone was a very great advantage. Among the earliest productions of the press on the continent were these editions, but it was some time before England followed the example of her neighbours in this respect, an edition of Terence, produced in 1497, being the first classical work printed here.

Before the invention of printing, Latin had, of course, been used here extensively enough, both by priests and scholars, but the way in which it had been employed was not one to favour the true cultivation of classical knowledge. Latin was learnt, not for the sake of those who wrote in it, or that the style and language of the great Roman writers might offer models for imitation, but simply because it was at once a universal and a stable language. All the spoken tongues of Europe were in a continual state of change. None had a sufficient literature to keep it fixed and unvarying, and it is very possible that what was written in any one of them became to a great extent unintelligible, or at least difficult of comprehension, to readers of a generation or two later. In fact we find frequent expres-

[1] *Lectures on the English Language*, Sect. XIX.

sion of the notion that those who would write for posterity ought to write in Latin. Such premature ageing of books would entail a much more serious loss in those days than now. They were produced at a slower rate then, and the literature of his own day could have afforded but a small library—even as libraries went in those days—to any student; so readers were therefore more dependent than in this latter time upon the work of preceding generations. Another and the more important reason for the use of Latin lay in the fact that a writer using his own language could expect but a small number of readers, and he was consequently driven to employ a language, the knowledge of which was not confined to those of his own race; so that Latin, the tongue of the once dominant nation, and hence of the Church, was adopted as the universal language of scholars throughout Europe. But Latin thus used became subject in some degree to those changes which must affect any language continually passed from hand to hand amongst men, and enduring the wear and tear of constant use. Remaining, as it did, essentially a language of scholars, it was preserved from many dangers incurred by the spoken languages, in their contact with the ruder business of life, yet still it could not remain entirely uninjured and unmodified by tendencies which worked such important changes in all its younger brethren. They manifested themselves in it, only to a less degree; the proneness to simplification, to the partial disuse of inflexions, and so on, until that curious product was arrived at, which we now call monkish or mediæval Latin; a language useful enough for the purposes for which it was required, but possessing little else to recommend it. This degradation of the language was now soon stopped by the multiplication of the editions of the classics above spoken of. Thus too a knowledge of Latin came to be no longer [illegible]usively the property of the monks, but was

spread abroad amongst the whole people, and there arose a new influence upon our literature and our language, that of Classical Latinity, of Latin no longer obtained either through the monks or through Romance tongues, but straight from the fountain-head of ancient Roman writings. This was the last great wave of extrinsic influence which flowed over the language, though the literature has since been subjected to various foreign dominations, which have had, however, almost no effect on English itself. The influence of this revival of learning was being exerted during the period which has been called that of Later English, a period which may be roughly estimated as comprising the whole of the sixteenth century. Its effects will be again referred to further on. However, it may be noticed here that Greek now for the first time became known in Western Europe. The capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 had dispersed a number of fugitive Greeks over Europe, who carried with them MSS. of the Greek classics, before unknown to the Western nations; and in no long time Greek also began to be printed, and a knowledge of it to be disseminated abroad.

Another effect of printing was manifested in the orthography of English. Before its invention orthography was chiefly phonetic, and very irregular. The curious device of Ormin, doubling the consonants after short vowels, shows how unsettled it was, and indeed there seem to have been scarcely any certain rules about it. The first effect of printing was to increase yet further this confusion. Most of the early printers employed foreign workmen, and hence arose many strange errors. One of the most curious is that which resulted in the common use of *ye* for *the* in old books. The Anglo-Saxon and old English þ was sufficiently like *y* to cause confusion between the two, and þ not being a German letter, *y* was often substituted for it. Hence we got *ye* and *yt* for *the*

and *that.* This is but an instance of the many similar errors arising from the same cause, errors which were as numerous in early printed Bibles as anywhere. Some copies of Wiclif's New Testament were printed in 1527 in Holland, and, not being even corrected for the press by an Englishman, they are full of typographical errors. Of course these, since they were not produced from an English press, hardly are a case in point, but the same thing was noticeable, to a less degree, in books printed in England.

Besides this, many changes were made purposely by the printers, either to adapt the old spelling to their own views, or to make their matter fit conveniently into their space. On the whole, the orthography of good MSS. of the fifteenth century actually approaches nearer to our modern standard than does that of the first printed works.

Thus the first effect of printing upon orthography was decidedly bad, but as soon as it gained more ground and became universally employed, its action was different and beneficial. Then it soon generated uniformity in spelling, as it did in everything else through the language, and a standard was gradually set up—how it were difficult to say, since to this day we have no authorities, no rule beyond general custom, for our spelling—with which everybody concurred, though varieties in spelling, especially in words of recent introduction, are found for a long time after this standard was acknowledged as correct by our writers. Even at the present day, we are not without varieties of spelling; we have *honour* and *honor* (this latter style has been adopted in his latest work by Mr Dickens, certainly one of the chief writers of our day[1]), *moveable* and *movable, civilization* and *civilisation,* not to speak of the

[1] Great as were the powers of Mr Dickens as a novelist, as a writer of English even his most ardent admirers would perhaps not place him very high.

past definite in *t*, *movt* for *moved*, which the late Archdeacon Hare always used and advocated.

Such were some of the special ways in which our language was affected by printing. On the great development of literature, and consequently of the language, which followed upon the complete establishment of the new art, there is no need to dilate. As culture increased, and the nation grew more civilised, as a matter of course a more perfect instrument for the interchange of thought was elaborated than had been found needful in ruder times, and inasmuch as the printing-press has been the greatest civilising agent of modern times, so its influence upon the language has been equal to its influence on the general growth of the national mind.

Such changes as those alluded to were certainly not to be wrought in a few years, or in a single generation; but inasmuch as they may in truth be traced back to the influence of printing, they may not unsuitably be treated of in connexion with its first introduction.

In the first productions of Caxton's press not very much improvement was manifested in English, as compared even with the works of Chaucer, nor was there much change so long as the conditions of society remained the same. A new state of things was gradually brought in by printing, but the introduction was very slow; slower even than in Germany and France.

Among the books printed by Caxton there is hardly a single original work, except those additions which he himself made to his publications. The text of his editions is by no means trustworthy, since he altered the orthography and grammar of his copies into conformance with his own standard. Besides this, the mechanical difficulties experienced by the early printers led them to take strange liberties with the MSS. they printed from. They had small hesitation in adding or omitting a letter

or so, to fill up a line, or to reduce it within the limits of the paper. Hence it is very often difficult to say whether any singularities in an ancient author, of whose works we possess no MSS., are due to his own style, or to the alterations of the printer. A great number of MSS. were destroyed in the process of being printed from, and besides they were less carefully preserved when printed books could be obtained. This was a serious loss, for these MSS. would be more valuable to us now in many cases than the black-letter books by which they were replaced. Thus there are scarcely any MSS. of Chaucer, and our oldest authorities are the early printed editions, so that there is often a doubt whether we really have anything like what he wrote.

Of all Caxton's works the most important is the *Morte d'Arthur*, and it is that which we may take as the best specimen of the prose of the time. The age of English prose was now beginning, and Sir Thomas Malory's work was one of its firstfruits, the first English prose work of any real importance. It is written in the purest English throughout, and though a translation from French, is remarkably free from any admixture of that language; there are very few obsolete words in it, and on the whole the diction is very like modern English, with the exception of a few archaisms of construction, while even some of these have reappeared in the style of one of our most modern schools of writers. *Hem* is still used for *them*, but this form scarcely appears in any later writers. As Southey remarked, the book was produced at a very happy period, when the language had sufficiently rid itself of Anglo-Saxon forms, but was not yet overrun by the classical words which afterwards were introduced into it.

The great jealousy of printing shown by ecclesiastics, on account of its being so powerful an agent in the diffusion of learning, was probably the cause why no Bibles

were printed by Caxton. Thus the MSS. of Wiclif's New Testament were preserved, and we are not dependent upon black-letter copies for the text of it, which is in consequence much more trustworthy than that of many contemporary works. The number of French words used by Caxton in his translations and his original additions to other works, is very large; nearly three times as large in proportion as the number of them used by Sir T. Malory. This is not strange, considering that Caxton lived and worked in France and Flanders for some years, before beginning to print in England.

The action of printing in assisting the revival of classical learning has been already alluded to. At first, it is true, the productions of Caxton's press were too few in number to cause any very great change, but as printing grew more common, and the price of books was reduced, one of the first effects of this greater cheapness was to extend a knowledge of the classics, and to take that knowledge out of the hands of the monks, to whom it had before almost exclusively belonged.

It has been noticed that until after the time of the publication of Lord Berners' translation of Froissart, there were hardly any words in English, of Latin derivation, which had not come to us through the French, except those which were obtained from ecclesiastical sources. A change in this respect was now setting in, and very many words were being adopted directly from classical sources. The distinction between the two classes is obvious enough, and it is easy to see how *blame* and *blaspheme*, *fealty* and *fidelity*, *poor* and *pauper*, may come from a common origin, and yet arrive in our language in such different forms, forms given them by the different roads which they have traversed.

The first influence of the Reformation was favourable to the revival of the old learning. When nearly all theo-

logical works were written in Latin on the continent, a knowledge of that language was necessary to English theologians, though afterwards there seems to have grown up a superstitious distrust of classical study, while the dissolution of the monasteries caused the destruction of a great number of copies of Latin works. Hence the first revival of this learning only lasted for a short time; and its influence was not really much exerted before the age of Elizabeth, when the attention of scholars was again directed to the ancient authors. At first this admiration for them fostered a tendency to over-rate their value, and under-estimate that of the vernacular literature; but this tendency did not last for long, and at length produced an English style modelled on that of classical exemplars, with constructions imitated from them. This was the style in which Bacon and Hooker wrote, and not a few of their contemporaries.

After Sir Thomas Malory comes Lord Berners, the translator of Froissart alluded to above. His syntax is marked by some old forms, such as the termination of the third singular present of verbs, in *-th*. Generally his style is less modern than that of his contemporary, Fisher, bishop of Rochester.

It is making a considerable step in advance, to pass from Lord Berners to Sir Thomas More, who may fairly be set down as our next English prose writer. It was only now that our mother-tongue was emerging from the earliest stage in every literature, the poetic. Before this time we have absolutely no prose writers. Chaucer left us a specimen, and Pecocke and Fortescue wrote in prose; but it would not be too much to say that it was not until the commencement of the Elizabethan era that English prose began really to be cultivated. Even yet there were only first beginnings to be seen. Sir T. More cannot be called a great writer. His writings certainly

show a later stage of the language, especially his *Life of Richard III.* (if indeed that be his), in which less is shown of his besetting weakness, bigotry. Perhaps we shall not be far wrong in considering More's English as the best specimen of his age's style, and as illustrating very fairly the capabilities of the language.

Contemporary with Sir Thomas More, and the object of his keenest hatred, was Tyndale, whose translation of the New Testament was the foundation of our present Authorised Version. In all probability this work did more to fix and settle the dialect, and exerted a stronger influence upon the whole language, than any book or any event from Chaucer to Shakspeare. His was the first Version we have from the original, Wiclif's having been taken from the Vulgate. It probably did something to counteract the tendency to classicism, as did also at a later time the Version of 1611.

Mr Marsh, in his *Lectures on the English Language*[1], has contrasted together several Versions of the New Testament, amongst others those of Wiclif and Tyndale, and from his careful examination many of the following remarks are taken. The verse selected for comparison is Matt. vii. 27:

καὶ κατέβη ἡ βροχὴ καὶ ἦλθον οἱ ποταμοὶ, καὶ ἔπνευσαν οἱ ἄνεμοι, καὶ προέκοψαν τῇ οἰκίᾳ ἐκείνῃ, καὶ ἔπεσε· καὶ ἦν ἡ πτῶσις αὐτῆς μεγάλη.

The Anglo-Saxon is as follows:

"Ða rinde hyt, and þaer com flod, and bleowon windas, and ahruron on þaet hus; and þaet hus feoll, and hys hryre was mycel."

Or, in modern English:

"Then rained it, and there came flood, and blew winds, and rushed on that house, and that house fell, and its fall was great."

[1] First Series, p. 185, in the 4th edition.

The Version of Wiclif is:

"And rayn came doun, and floodis camen, and windis blewen, and thei hurliden in to that hous; and it felle doun, and the fallyng doun thereof was grete."

That of Tyndale:

"And abundaunce of rayne descended, and the fluddes came, and the wyndes blewe and beet vpon that housse, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

Now the chief things to be noticed are, that in the Anglo-Saxon the verbs all precede their subjects, and are inflected, two of them being plural. Wiclif retains the plural form, with the *on* changed into *en*, the first step towards its abolition, but alters the relative position of verb and subject: also the preterite *com* has become *came*. In Tyndale the plural in *n* is obsolete, but the *e* final still remains. Again, the definite article, once used in this passage by Wiclif, had become common by Tyndale's time, who uses it as we should. It seems most probable that in Anglo-Saxon *the* was never anything else than a weaker form of the demonstrative. Three obsolete words (unless *mycel* can be said to have survived in *mickle*, or *much*, of which last it seems a sort of diminutive form) occur in the Anglo-Saxon Version, none in Wiclif, though *hurl* is used in a sense now at least uncommon.

The Authorised Version only differs from that of Tyndale, in having *rain* substituted for his *abundaunce of rayne*. Similar varieties are to be found in the remainder of the text, which follows so closely the language of Tyndale, that it is impossible to consider our present Bible as a specimen of the language of the people at the time of its publication. Tyndale followed Wiclif in his grammatical structure, and all later versions coincide with Tyndale's, so that we must needs consider the language into which the Bible was rendered as one somewhat apart *and separate* from the ordinary popular dialect. Perhaps

it always occupied somewhat the same relative position to our common speech as it does now, standing a little apart from and above it; differing from it much in the same way two hundred years ago as now; always intelligible to the people; never, at any time, making use of the common language of everyday life. This is but natural enough; the translators of the sacred books sought out a style fitted to their solemn subject, and naturally adopted one differing in many respects from that which would appear most suitable for ordinary use. Wiclif did not use the same diction in his New Testament as in his other works, nor, it is probable, did any of his successors. Of course there is much more difference between Wiclif and Tyndale, than between Tyndale and the Authorised Version, but then it is to be remembered that two centuries elapsed between the publication of the first and the second,—centuries, too, in which the language was undergoing considerable change,—only eighty-five years between the last two. Besides, Wiclif translated from the Vulgate, Tyndale from the original Greek; circumstances which would be sufficient to account for changes infinitely greater than those which we can perceive.

The great theological conflict which England was now going through, could not be without influence on the language, as on all else. The separation from Rome threw the mind of England back on its own resources, and compelled it to follow out by itself its further development. The tumult of argument and controversy roused its innate powers, and urged on its further advance. Hence[1] "our mother-tongue acquired and put forth a compass of vocabulary, a force and beauty of diction and a power of precise logical expression, of which scarce any other European tongue was then capable, and which the best English writers of later centuries can hardly be said to have surpassed."

[1] Marsh. Series I., p. 189.

As we approach nearer the era of Elizabeth, the number of authors begins to multiply rapidly; but as individual distinctions also begin to grow less marked, there is not so much necessity for particularising their various works. In the earlier periods of our literary history, it was needful to consider the work of each man rather by itself rather than as forming a part of a greater whole. Now, on the contrary, the language of all our writers was being harmonised, and reduced to the same standard, so that it is possible to judge of the language of the time, not simply of those few writers who wrote during the time, as of old. For philological enquiries Shakspeare and Spenser are less important than Layamon and Ormin, since, if we lost the works of the two former, we should still have plenty of other authors who wrote in the same language, though with infinitely less mastery over it, whereas the elder writers are the only examples left us of their time. After the Bible of Tyndale is passed, it requires little more to carry us on to the Authorised Version, so far as the language is concerned, while in the secular speech there is not much to notice beyond the number of Latinisms now filling the language.

The writings of Hawes show how rapidly this influx was proceeding. He was one of those allegorical poets of whom the greatest, and nearly the last, was Spenser.

Following him were the two "courtly makers," Surrey and Wyatt, writers of a very different strain, and belonging to a much more modern school. Having no models in their own country, they were driven to make use of a dialect and manner more popular, and therefore more advanced, than that used by their literary contemporaries. They had considerable influence on succeeding English literature, but not very much on the language. We gained little in our vocabulary, and suffered no change in syntax, from the Italian influence dominant during the

last part of Henry the Eighth's reign. What influence these two poets exerted was due to the fact that they introduced a new school, and consequently caused an inclination to care less for the older authors, the study of whom from this time declined.

About the same time we may perceive the rise of a school of purists, who endeavoured to make a stand against the introduction of Latinisms. Chief among these was Sir John Cheke, who was so anxious to keep the pure Anglo-Saxon form of the language, that he created many compounds in Anglo-Saxon, which have since died, or rather, which never obtained any real footing in the language. Such are *crossed* for *crucified*, and the like.

Contemporary with Sir J. Cheke was Ascham, who condemned the use of English, but employed it well and carefully himself. He was one of the last who ventured to prefer the classical to the vernacular tongue, since the splendid period of our literature which was just commencing when he wrote, soon elevated our language to a rank equal with that of the older tongues, to a position which none could afford to despise.

Few works of this period are more interesting, in a philological point of view, than the curious *French Grammar* of Palsgrave, printed in 1530, for the use of the Princess Mary, sister to Henry VIII. The attention to grammar evidenced by this and similar works, was doubtless caused by the influence of classical scholarship, since we do not meet with any similar works before this time. The chief value of Palsgrave's book lies in the fact that it gives us a fair knowledge of many recognised forms in the English of his day, by means of the comparisons it draws between the two languages. He also gives us a clue to the pronunciation both of English and French at that time. A peculiarity in his own style is that he makes his technical adjectives agree with their nouns, as "*verbes actyves*

personalles;" "*pronouns interrogatives:*"—we have a remnant of this same style, in the phrase "know all men by these presents" (subauditis *letters*). Of course the principal grammar of this time is that of Ben Jonson, though, like all works written in the infancy of any science, his reasoning is not always accurate, or his deductions true. He was at all events more correct than many of his successors as to the use of *his* as the sign of the possessive,[1] *e.g.* "Pyrrhus his toe," "Phalaris his bull" (Sir T. Browne), or later in Pope,

"The young Telemachus his blooming years."

This form is upheld by Addison (*Spect:* 207): "The same single letter *s* on many occasions does the office of a whole word, and represents the *his* and *her* of our forefathers." Such a remark as this does but show the real ignorance of Addison respecting the structure of that language in the use of which he was so great a master. Ben Jonson, on the contrary, more familiar with the form *-is* which had replaced the Saxon *-es*, saw how the error had arisen, and had "brought in first the monstrous syntaxe of the pronoune *his* joyning with a noune betokening a possessor, as the *Prince his* house, for the Princis house."

This corruption was doubtless aided by the pronunciation of the last syllable of the possessive, as in the *Mirrour for Magistrates* we find—

"With Nightes starres thick powdred every where."

In several other respects also, this curious work shows an archaic tendency; thus the Anglo-Saxon gerundial with passive signification is found in it,

"The soil that earst so seemly was to seen."

The consideration of the above book lands us fairly in the reign of Elizabeth, and the glorious era to which she has given her name. It has been before remarked *that this age,* however great its literary glories, is far less

important, in a linguistic point of view, than those which preceded it. A race of men were now arising who could fitly wield that instrument which their fathers, generation after generation, had slowly forged; true, in the use it received that polish and finish which only use could give to it, but when it came into their hands it was actually finished and perfected, and it has received little change, either in their time, or in the years which have since elapsed.

It was during this period that the strength and vigour which we have always boasted to be the peculiar properties of the English mind were manifest, it may be said, to a greater degree than either before or since. The age was a truly original one, and its writers owed little or nothing to the examples of those of other kingdoms:— "Perhaps[1] the genius of Great Britain (if I may so speak without offence or flattery) never shone out fuller or brighter, or looked more like itself, than at this period. Our writers and great men had something in them that savoured of the soil from which they grew: they were not French, they were not Dutch, or German, or Greek, or Latin, they were truly English.....The mind of their country was in them, and it prevailed."

This extract describes truly enough the real spirit which guided the writers of this time, yet the very greatness of the time prevented our having much change to notice in the language. The chief thing we can remark is the introduction of Latinisms, which the revived taste for classical literature caused. At one time the introduction of Latin words threatened to injure the language seriously. Even as late as Hooker, signs of this conflict between Latin and Saxon are visible, since he sometimes uses words derived from both roots to explain his meaning, as "*cecity* and *blindness*," "*nocive* or *hurtful*," "*sense* and *meaning*." Some of his Latinisms have perished; others,

[1] Hazlitt, *Lectures on the Age of Elizabeth*, Lect. 1.

as the last mentioned, still exist. Some of these words were condemned by Shakspeare, as "desolation," "remuneration," and "accommodate," all of them now common enough, but all of them in his time considered pedantic and their use fit matter for ridicule. Probably to Shakspeare and Spenser we owe it that the language was not overrun with Latin, and to them also, in a great measure, must be given the credit of our deliverance from Euphuism, which, if not so bad in the hands of Lyly, its greatest master, was certainly, when used by his imitators, worthy all the ridicule that has since been bestowed upon it. As for Lyly himself, he is never read now; "Labelled by the compilers with a certain character, he is now read only by a stray antiquary once or twice in a generation, until the traditional view of his *Euphues* is represented by the saying of Gifford that it 'did incalculable mischief by vitiating the taste, corrupting the language, and introducing a spurious and unnatural mode of conversation[1].'"

Some of this contempt is certainly due to Sir W. Scott's character of Sir Percie Shafton, who is, it must be allowed, not a very life-like portraiture. Besides, what Sir Walter describes is rather the Euphuism of the Hôtel Rambouillet than that of Lyly and his followers. *Euphues* really in great part consists of a treatise on education, and borrows a good deal from Ascham's *Schoolmaster*, which was published seven or eight years before it; the work also has far greater merits than most readers imagine, though to our modern taste it is over full of "fine phrases, smooth quirks, merry taunts, jesting without meane, and mirth without measure." Still, the ease and spontaneity with which Lyly pours out his flood of quaint conceits reconcile us, in a great degree, to their character; while his imitators, Sidney for instance, and still more Greene, very often

[1] Morley's *English Writers*, Vol. 1.

only succeed in becoming laboriously dull. In a preface to the *Menaphron* of the latter, commonly ascribed to Nash, we find Chaucer, Gower and Lydgate boldly opposed to all other poets of the world, while the writer declares his preference for Spenser over any contemporary poet of "France, Spain, Italy, and all the world."

Had Lyly's writings really possessed the character generally ascribed to them, they would never have exercised the influence they did in such an age as that of Elizabeth. His imitators were able to seize upon the most obvious and the worst features of his style, but the better points they were unable to apprehend. They rendered Euphuism ridiculous, and caused it to be satirised by the best writers of the time; by Shakspeare in his *Love's Labour Lost*, by Ben Jonson in his *Cynthia's Revels*. The stronger and more sensible spirit of the people saved the language and the literature from such degradation as was undergone by that of France at the hands of the précieuses and their followers, and which was cleared away by the more powerful race which arose in France after the reign of the précieuses had passed away, Corneille, Racine, Molière, Boileau, and their several schools. The golden age of English letters had place earlier, and checked at the first outset the germ of weakness evidenced in Euphuism.

Spenser may be considered the last of the allegorical school of poets, and as he was the last, so he was undoubtedly the best. The gorgeous and dazzling imagery of his *Faerie Queene* placed him at once above imitation, and he, like Shakspeare, has no followers. His admiration for Chaucer inclined him to revive, perhaps, too great a number of obsolete words, but this very fault possibly to some degree counterbalanced the influx of Latinisms. Amongst those to be noted as neologists, Bacon holds a conspicuous place. Few writers have introduced

so many Latin words, though it is to be allowed that most of Bacon's words have since taken root, more or less firmly, in the language.

But another and most important influence was soon at work to counteract all tendency to innovation in our tongue: that of the English Bible, and second to it, of the English Liturgy. The language of both is our best and finest form of English, being almost pure Anglo-Saxon. The truth of this is easily evidenced by comparing our version with the Anglo-Rhemish version published in 1582. Archbishop Trench[1] compares the two together, and notices many of the words used in the latter, such as "impudicity," "ebrieties," "commessations," "long-animity," in the place of our more familiar Saxon synonyms. In a book intended for the people, how much better are the words of the language of the people. Even if they do not convey the most exact idea of the meaning of the original, at least they give the mind a far nearer notion than can be afforded by words like the above, which are in truth almost technicalities. (The words occur Gal. v. 19.) The influence exercised by our translation, and its after effects on the speech and mind of the English people (such effects, for instance, as those alluded to in a passage from Dr Newman's writings, quoted by Archbishop Trench, l. c.), hardly come within the subject of this essay, which must leave the language at the time the Bible first appeared, and can say but little about its after course. An allusion to them here must be sufficient.

At the time when the Authorised Version of the Bible appeared, the language was in a remarkably fixed and stable state; more so, indeed, than it had ever been at any time since the first introduction of the classical element.

[1] *English Past and Present*, p. 37.

Consequently, although the translators did not fix upon the dialect of their own time, the dialect which would naturally appear to them vulgarised by familiar use, they had yet the advantage which the possession, the knowledge, of such a tongue as the English of that age must give.

Another circumstance contributed to the value of the translation. Neither Greek nor Oriental learning had long reached a pitch sufficient to enable them to influence any version very deeply, beyond the bare translating from the original Greek; but in the time of James, they—Oriental learning more especially—had made very great progress, and the effect is shown in the Bible of 1611.

How closely this version follows that of Tyndale has been noticed, and we have seen that in consequence of this, and of the difference between theological and lay writings, it is not correct to hold the language of the Bible as a fair example of the English of its time. Nevertheless no previous time could have produced it, or produced any work at all equal to it in style. Though belonging in many respects (as regards language) to the same class of works as Pecocke's writings, for instance, it yet differs from them in style as widely almost as it does from the writings of authors contemporary with it. It stands alone, the greatest work that our language has ever produced.

Such, in rough outline, was the course pursued by our language in the time between the first and last English Bible; the time which, if the language was rough-hewn into its true shape before, perfected and polished it up into the form it has since preserved. As to the shortcomings in the execution of the task, they can be more patent to no one than the writer. Little pretence can be made to originality in what has been said; and if any merit can be claimed for it, it is but that of having collected the thoughts of others together, and presented

them at once. Still one of the greatest essayists who ever lived was content to label his work as "A Garland of Flowers, where only the string that binds them is my own;" and what Montaigne acknowledged, his feebler followers need not be ashamed to confess. But "qui s'excuse, s'accuse," and this work, like all other work in the world, must stand or fall by its own merits.

APPENDIX I.

TABLE OF ENGLISH LITERATURE, A.D. 1300—A.D. 1611.

1313	(*Boccaccio, b.*)
1321	(*Dante, d.*)
1324 (?)	Wiclif, *b.*
1326 (?)	Gower, *b.*; Langlande, *b.*
1327	EDWARD III.
1328 (?)	Chaucer, *b.*
1330	*End of Early English. Commencement of Middle English.*
1336	(*Froissart.*)
1348 (?)	Romaunt of the Rose.
1350 (?)	John of Trevisa.
1356	Mandeville's Travels.
1370 (?)	Lydgate, *b.*; Occleve, *b.*
1377	RICHARD II.
1378	Piers Plowman (not before this year).
1381	Wat Tyler.
1383	WICLIF'S BIBLE.
1384	Trevisa's Polychronicon.
——	Wiclif, *d.*
1398 (?)	Canterbury Tales.
1398	Confessio Amantis.
——	Pecocke, *b.*
1399	HENRY IV.
1400	Chaucer, *d.*
1408	Gower, *d.*
1412	Caxton, *b.*
1413	HENRY V.
1420	King's Quhair.
1450	Repressor.
1454	Jul: Berners' Hawking, &c.
——	(*Constantinople taken.*)
1466	Morte d'Arthur.
——	Fortescue's Laws of England.
1474	(*Ariosto, b.*) (*Mich: Angelo, b.*)
——	Printing in England.
1483	EDWARD V. RICHARD III.
——	(*Luther.*) (*Raffaelle.*)
1485	HENRY VII.
1492	(*Columbus disc: West Indies.*)
1494	(*Rabelais.*)

1496	John Knox, *b.*
1500	W. Dunbar's Thistle and Rose.
——	*Later English commences.*
1505	Paston Letters end (comm: 1422).
1506	Hawes' Pastime of Pleasure.
1509	HENRY VIII.
1516	Sir T. More's Utopia.
1524	Lord Berners' Tr. of Froissart.
1534	Tyndale's New Testament.
——	(*Montaigne, b.*)
1536	Cheke's Remedy for Sedition.
1539	Cranmer's Bible.
1540	Surrey and Wyatt's poems now nearly all published.
1544	(*Tasso, b.*)
1545	Ascham's Toxophilus.
1547	EDWARD VI.
1553	Raleigh, *b.*
——	MARY.
1557	Genevan Version.
——	Mirrour for Magistrates.
1558	ELIZABETH.
1560	Bacon, *b.*
1564	Shakspeare, *b.*
1570	Schoolmaster.
1580	Euphues.
1582	Anglo-Rhemish Version.
1584	Greene's works began to be published.
1586	Sidney, *d.*
1590	Sidney's Arcadia.
1591	Herrick, *b.*
1592	Quarles, *b.*
1593	Herbert, *b.*
1600	*Modern English Period.*
1603	JAMES I.
1608	Milton, *b.*
1611	AUTHORISED VERSION.

NOTE. Only sufficient dates are given in the above Table to illustrate the various changes manifested in the Language—not the Literature—of England, during the specified period.

Events connected with foreign Literature are in brackets and italics.

The usual divisions into periods are given in italics.

APPENDIX II.

Early English Bibles.

The first work we have which can in any way be looked on as an approach to a version of the Bible is that of Cædmon (died A.D. 676, according to Bede), whose poem is a sort of paraphrase in verse of some of the Old Testament History. The Venerable Bede speaks of it (*Hist.* Lib. IV. c. 24) in the following words :—

"Cædmonus canebat de creatione mundi et origine humani generis, et tota Genesis historia, de egressu Israel ex Ægypto, et ingressu in terram repromissionis, ac de aliis plurimis Sacræ Scripturæ historiis."

Thus Cædmon's writings have little pretence to be a translation, and are rather a poem on sacred subjects than anything more. In the early part of the 8th century two Anglo-Saxon versions of the Psalms seem to have been made. They are attributed to Aldhelm, Bishop of Shermon, and Guthlac. During the same century the Venerable Bede's translation of St John's Gospel appeared. This was the first part of the New Testament translated. To the time of Alfred's reign are probably to be attributed the two MSS. known as the *Durham Book*, and the *Rushworth Gloss*. The first of these is in Latin, with interlinear Anglo-Saxon translation, by a priest named Aldred. The second is also Latin and Anglo-Saxon interlined, but the author is unknown. Alfred translated the ten commandments, and some passages from Exodus. Other parts are also attributed to him, but uncertainly. In the same century, but a little later on, Ælfric executed his version of parts of the Old Testament. Some of this was literal, the rest paraphrase. Besides these a third version of the New Testament

in Anglo-Saxon exists, probably written shortly before the Norman Conquest.

Some translations of the Psalms into Anglo-Saxon, which are still extant, may probably be ascribed to the same date; while to a period somewhat later belong three Anglo-Norman versions of the Gospels, of which one is said to be of the time of William the Conqueror, but is probably ante-dated, since it shows greater modifications in the language than we have any reason to suppose took place at so early a date. The two are perhaps correctly dated, as having been produced in the reign of Henry II.

Generally it is to be noticed that the parts translated were those principally used in the Church Services: the Psalms, the Gospels, and the historical portions of the Old Testament. It seems as if the translations had been made for the use of priests; but, as the knowledge of Latin was general, there was the less need for them. The unlearned could not read at all, and the learned preferred Latin. Still, the number of versions was greater at this time than afterwards, since the knowledge of Latin spread yet further after the Conquest, and became more exclusively the language of the Church than it had ever been, before the introduction of the Romance element into the English tongue.

The following list gives all the versions or paraphrases of the Scriptures which are known to have existed before the 14th century, in addition to those above mentioned.

i. *The Ormulum.* Metrical and unrhymed. The Gospels and Acts.

ii. The metrical paraphrase of the Old and New Testaments, in the book called *Sowlehele* or *Salus Animæ.* This is supposed to be prior to 1300.

iii. The Northern paraphrase of Genesis and Exodus, about the same date (now in C. C. C. C. Library).

iv. A metrical Psalter of same date.

v. A revised version of the Psalms. Somewhat later.

vi. A prose version of the Psalms by Rolle of Hampden. *Before* 1450.

vii. A metrical version of the Penitential Psalms, part of Job, and the Lord's Prayer, by the same.

viii. Two other prose versions of the Psalms.

ix. The Gospels of St Mark and St Luke, and the Epistles of St Paul.

x. The Northern translations of the Dominical Gospels.

From some remarks by Sir T. More, in his defence of Bishop Tunstall for burning Wiclif's New Testament, it has been thought that various other English Bibles existed, long before the time of Wiclif, and that the whole Bible had before been translated. He blamed Wiclif, not for translating the Bible, but for the "prologues and glosses" he had added. Elsewhere (*Dialogues*, b. III. c. 15) he says, that he had himself seen old translations of the Bible, which had been approved by the bishop of the diocese. It is difficult to reconcile this statement with the fact that no such version, or even record of its existence, has come down to us. In all probability More was mistaken. It has been suggested that he took one of Wiclif's Bibles (without notes) for an earlier one, or concluded that such existed from the wording of the constitution of 1408, which prohibits versions made "in the time of Wyclif, or since," thus seeming to imply the existence of older translations. At any rate, Sir T. More's statement remains unconfirmed, and unauthenticated.

(English Hexapla, Bagster. Baber's Edition of Wiclif's Translation.)

APPENDIX III.

Inflectional Changes in the Verb.

The following table, extracted from the lately published Anglo-Saxon grammar by Mr Marsh, of Lafayette College, U. S., shows the changes in the inflexions of the verbs, or, as Mr Marsh calls it, their "weathering," during the period under discussion.

It may help to illustrate what has been advanced above, touching the changes in English. The sign < means *derived from;* > means *whence is derived.*

"Indicative Present.

	Ang.-Sax. S.	Ang.-Sax. W.	Layamon. S.	Layamon. W.	Ormulum. S. & W.	Chaucer. S. & W.	Shakespeare. S. & W.
Sing.—1.	*e*	*ie*	*e*	*ie*	*e*	*e*, —	—
2.	*est*	*ast*	*est*	*est*	*esst*	*est*	*est*
3.	*eth*	*ath*	*eth*	*eth*	*eth*	*eth, es*	*eth, s*
Plur.—	*ath*	*iath*	*eth*	*ieth*	*enn*	*eth, en, e*	—

Imperfect.

Sing.—1.	—	*e*	—	*e*	—	*e*	—	*e*, —	—
2.	*e*	*est*	*e*	*est*	*e*	*est, e*	*e*, —, *est*	*est*	*est*
3.	—	*e*	—	*e*	—	*e*	—	*e*, —	—
Plur.—	*on*	*on*	*en*	*en*	*enn*	*enn*	*en, e*, —	*en, e*, —	—

Subjunctive sing. *e*, plur. *en, e*, stands to Chaucer, is gone in Shakespeare.
Imperative sing. *e, a*, plur. *eth, ath*, weathers like the indicative.
Infinitive *an*, Layamon *en*, Ormulum *enn*, Chaucer *en, e*, —, Shakesp. —.
Participle present *ende* > Layamon *ende, inde, inge*, Chaucer *end, and, yng*, Shakespeare *ing*, conforming with verbal nouns in *ing* < Ang.-Sax. *ung, ing.*
Participle past *en* > *n*; *ôd* > *ad* > *ed*. The prefix *ge-* > Layamon *i-* is rare in Ormulum; Chaucer often uses *i-* or *y-*, but with this participle only; Shakespeare ridicules it."

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